



*HISTORY OF A CLASSIC CAR*

**Adolf (Dufi) Kock**

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*Dedicated to Mr. Mirto de Kort and family*

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## **The history of the first car in Aruba**

Before we begin with the history of the classic car, it would be nice to give a short and interesting story of the first car that arrived in Aruba. To Aruba, the arrival of the first car in 1915 must have been a miracle as great as the time that the indians saw the Spaniards on their horses for the first time. The first means of transportation arrived in Aruba in 1880 and were called the "Kitoki" and the "Kitrin". The kitoki was mostly used on smooth roads and the Kitrin in rough roads. It was a small and fast vehicle which was pulled by a horse. In two or three hours the Kitoko would take you from one district to the other. In those days they would not pass along the coast, but would take the inside roads like: Dakota, Mahuma, Sabana Grandi, and the French Pass. It is said that only three of these vehicles were in Aruba because the roads were inadequate. A gentleman by the name of Bake had the responsibility to dominate the horses, so they could pull the Kitoko. In 1910 one could buy a good horse for AFIs.150.00.

In 1915 the first car arrived in Aruba. Dr. George R. Hopkins was the first person to buy a car, manufactured by Metz. In those days there were no cargo ship that could bring a car. For that reason, the car came dismantled in pieces in a few boxes with instructions how to assemble it. A ships's pilot, R. Johan Beaujon, was the one who helped assemble it. It took some weeks before it was completed. They waited until a Sunday morning, when the Catholic and the Protestant masses were on, to test the car. On the road from Ponton to Noord, without any pedestrians on the road, they learned to manage the car with only written instructions. "It seems as if the car would blow in pieces", said Beaujon. After a few hours they could manage to drive the car and that Sunday afternoon Oranjestad had a topic to talk about, when Dr. Hopkins and Mr. Beaujon drove by with the monster on high wheels and blowing off smoke.

## **The car in Savaneta**

An interesting story is when Dr. Hopkins worked in Savaneta. Near his home, Anita Bisslick would raise a flag to the top every Thursday morning. It was a white flag with a red letter “D” on it. If the flag was not at the top, it meant that the doctor was not in Savaneta. When Dr. Hopkins drove his car in Savaneta, all the people from Savaneta would admire: “the wagon without a horse”. When the doctor was arriving, Ma Nica, who just got water from the well, was walking with a can of water on her head. When she heard the car blow the horn, she got frightened that the can of water spilled all over her. She arrived home all wet. Others say that Ma Nica was so frightened that she went to hide near the sea. The tires were very narrow. Julia Kock saw “the wagon without a horse” passing alongside her and she went to investigate the tracks that the tires left behind. She screamed: “This is large soldier crab”.

Soon the people began to get accustomed to the doctor’s car. On a certain day, a man went to meet the doctor near Bak’i Salo. He stopped the doctor to tell him about his wife’s illness. Talking to the doctor, he tied his donkey to the fender of the car and the doctor told him: “Well, OK, get in, lets’s go”. The man opened the door, jumped in and it was not until they arrived to the house that the man remembered about the donkey. They got only the rope.....

The first car also caused the first traffic accident in Savaneta, but not fatal and not serious. The doctor’s car hit Nicolaas Kock, who immediately was transported to Oranjestad in the same car.

The second car, a Ford, was bought by Doctor H. E. Oduber, and the third was also a Ford, which was bought in Curacao by Mr. Segundo N. Ecury.

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Johan Hartog 1980 “Aruba Zoals Het Was Zoals Het Werd”; and Father G. van Veen 1974 “Savaneta Antes y Awor”.

### **The story of the classic car**

I am a **1964 Chevrolet Impala SS Convertible**, 6-cylinder, with automatic Powerglide transmission, with almost its complete originality. I was fabricated in the United States of America in the year 1964, with a yellowish color with white wall tires. I feel very happy that all my components are still working perfectly. Up to now I have known five owners. I now feel myself very proud to be considered a **Classic American Car**.

### **Original owner 1964–1965 - Mr. Roy E. Nystrom**

On February 3, 1964 Mr. Roy E. Nystrom started to work as Vice President at the Lago Oil & Transport Co., Ltd. in Aruba. That same year he bought a 1964 Chevrolet Impala SS Convertible from the States. It was a 6-cylinder car with automatic Powerglide transmission and most probably for the family since, in his position, he was assigned a company car. In those days convertible cars were in. When the car arrived, he asked Mr. Aiky Croes, who was running the Lago Colony Esso Service Station, to pick up the car at the Oranjestad harbor. In those days it was a custom that the Esso Service would go to pick up these cars because they were the ones to clean and service them upon arrival. The station always had on hand a license plate which they called a “floating number” to put on the car to drive it up to the station.

Mr. Croes and Emanuel G. Engelhardt, better known as “Papi” who was working at the station went to Oranjestad to pick up the car. The car arrived on the deck of a cargo ship along with with several others ordered by the Aruba Trading Company, agent for Chevrolet in those days. In those days the cars would be unloaded using the ship’s crane. The car arrived without its hubcaps for security purposes and they

would put them inside the trunk. When Aiky and Papi were finished with custom's documents, Papi got into the car, in fact the first person to drive the car in Aruba, and drove it on the old road back of the airport to the colony. In the meantime Aiky went to the Tax Office, situated near the present Governor's Office. Aiky paid Fls.61.00 for the license plate, for full year, and he got the number A-3904.

In those days, because the cars came on the deck of the ship, the manufacturer would coat them for salt air prevention. When Papi went to clean the car, he took out the hub caps out of the trunk. They were in those days put in the trunk for security measures. They were Super Sport rim #14. Papi liked them very much and told Mr. Nystrom also. Mr. Nystrom told him that he could change them with him if he can replace them with the same size, when he leaves Lago. When Papi finished washing the car, he immediately took it to the Police Station in San Nicolas and Mr. Sichi Wong inspected and tested it. He paid Fls.3.50. After a week Papi changed the oil using Exxon 10W30 and undercoated it with a spray can. From then on Papi was the only person responsible for washing, servicing and polishing the car. Mr. Nystrom called him "Sonny".

In the beginning family Nystrom considered the importance of the car and only Mrs. Nystrom would drive it and always with the top down. Mr. Nystrom very seldom drove it because he would be driving the company car. Later on, it is said that the children also drove it and sometimes irresponsibly. At one time they drove it on a huge rock and broke the exhaust pipe of the car. Since the Aruba Trading did not have this type of exhaust, Papi went to Mr. Sichi Wong who had a little shop at Wong Kin, Weg Seroe Preto #25 in San Nicolas where the Botica Seroe Preto is now situated and Sichi made it for him. Another time the youngsters hit the car on a sidewalk and blew the front tire. Papi said that the car came with a security tire that the only way he could repair it was to take out the tire from the back of the rim.



In 1965, when Mr. Nystrom was leaving Lago, he asked Papi: "Sonny, I am going to sell my baby, would you be interested..... if not, would you get me a buyer?" Papi told him that he couldn't. Then Papi remembered of one person, Mr. Juan Briezen, who always admired the car. He immediately contacted Mr. Briezen. Papi now has his own Papi's Car Care & Auto Parts at Hildebrandstraat #17, in San Nicolas, and is doing very well.

### **Second owner 1965-1970 - Mr. Juan Briezen:**

Mr. Briezen, who was living at Fort Heuvelstraat, Lago Heights in those days had a Fiat 600, motor in the back, bought the car from family Nystrom in 1965. In those days Juan was very much involved with golf at the Aruba Golf Club and since he was managing the club then, he went to live in a bungalow at the golf complex. Juan apparently used it for transportation purposes. In 1970, Juan decided that he was going to trade in the car at Viana Auto Supplies. At that time Mr. Everaldo Medardo Werleman, who was a supervisor for Acisco also like the car. Therefore, when Juan went to trade it in, Everaldo went with him and bought it, while Juan bought a Chrysler New Yorker. Mr. Brown was the salesman then. It so happens that Juan up to today still has the license plate number A-3904.

According to Juan, at one time, Mr. Nystrom was in Aruba and he called him to find out if he still had the car as he wanted to buy it back because the car had much value in the States. Juan told him that the owner of the Double Seven Bar & Restaurant in Savaneta had the car and he had it in top condition that he believed this guy would not sell it. At the moment Juan lives at Bungalow 1577 at the Seroe Colorado, and up to today has the number of the convertible, **A-3904**.

### **Third owner 1970-1971 - Mr. Everaldo Medardo Werleman:**

Mr. Everaldo Medardo Werleman who was living in Savaneta, became the third owner 1970. He also used it for transportation. In

1971, he decided that he was to trade in the car at Viana Auto Supplies. Another person, Mr. Benny Vrolijk, who was working for Everaldo, and who used to get a ride to work with him was also interested in the car.

#### **Fourth owner 1971 -1985 - Mr. Benny Vrolijk:**

In 1971, when Everaldo went to Viana to trade in the car for a Mercury Montego, Mr. Benny Vrolijk became the fourth owner of the car. Although he was using the car for transportation, he kept in good shape. One day, after work he decided to stop at the Double Seven Bar & Restaurant, which was owned by Mr. Mirto de Kort. When Mirto saw the car, he went outside to take a closer look at it. He came back inside and without knowing Benny personally, asked him if he would be interested in selling the car. Benny told Mirto that he likes the car and had the least intention to sell it. Mirto then gave him his address and telephone number just in case he decided to sell it. One day, a friend of Mirto told him that someone was looking for him about selling a car. Mirto at first did not realize that it would be Benny. Later, he remembered and called Benny right away. He went to Santa Cruz, where Benny lived, and the deal was made. When he went to pick up the car, Benny almost cried to see Mirto go with it. It is said that when Benny had the car, Juan Briezen approached him to see if he would sell him the car, but in vain.

#### **Fifth owner 1985-present -Mr. Mirto A. de Kort**

November 1985, eight months after Lago had closed down, Mirto A. de Kort, who is living at Gen. Majoor de Bruynewijk 64, in Savaneta, became the fifth owner. In the beginning Mirto did not see the value of the car and neither suspected the kind of role the car was going to play in his life. It was on Sundays that he would wake up early in the morning to give the car a thorough wash to drive it with the top down. At one time he even pulled a boat on a trailer. In the early days a convertible played an important part in special events like weddings,

parade, etc. Later this died a little because the bridesmaids would complain that it was too windy and mess up their hairdos. Lately, this has picked up again.

On November 14, 1985, Mirto had the honor to use the car in a wedding in Savaneta and here is where the car got its public attention. Here also is where Mirto saw the importance of a convertible car. Then in February 1987 Mirto went to pick up our 33<sup>rd</sup> Carnival Queen, Miss Jerusha Rasmijn, our niece, at the Wilhelmina Stadium with his convertible.

### **Antique Car Club Aruba (ACCA)**

On December 11, 1988 Mirto and some friends who also had antique cars decided to come together to form a club which they called the "Antique Car Club Aruba". They formed a board which consisted of Mirto as the President, Mariano Arendsz as the Secretary, and Tico Kock as the Treasurer. Their goals were: (a) Get more members; (2) Prepare rules and regulations; (3) Museum, library, and workshop; (4) Insurance and import duties; (5) Subscribe in the media.

### **Classic Car Club Aruba (CCCA)**

In a meeting of January 16, 1997, when the interest somewhat died, they decided to change the name of the club for two reasons. One was that Antique Car Club Aruba was not appropriate because antique cars were considered those before 1940, during World War II. Since classic cars were considered after that, they changed the name to Classic Car Club Aruba. They formed a new board consisting of: Mirto, Eddy Werleman, Mariano Arendsz, Oswald Jones, and Ale Vrolijk.

### **Flag and Hymn Day**

Mirto and his friends have been very active in showing off their cars in special events, like the Aruba Flag and Hymn Day at the Plaza Libertador Betico Croes every year on March 18th. After that they would go to the Alhambra Casino parking lot for another show for the tourists and others.

### **Invitation – Wabi Club Curacao**

On April 20, 2000, Classic Car Club Aruba was invited by the Wabi Club in Curacao. A total of 19 cars from Aruba participated and this gave them a tremendous international experience because it was the first time that they crossed the ocean with their cars.

### **Mirto's car honored**

In 2002, Mirto's car had the honor to be on the cover of their Classic Car Club's calendar in the month of May.

### **Color change**

At one time Mirto, for one reason or the other, decided to change the color of the car. Originally the car came in a yellowish color. But, it didn't take long for Mirto to realize that yellow was the unique color and changed it back.

### **Classic Chevy World coverage**

On various occasions did the car get local and international coverage in the press. For example, one of them was a beautiful coverage in the U.S. magazine, "Classic Chevy World" in April 2003, titled "Aruba Cruiser". This magazine is published monthly by the Classic Chevy International with their office in Orlando, Florida and has a world distribution. This publication meant: (a) a tremendous exposure of the

car and Classic Car Club Aruba; and an excellent promotion to the island of Aruba.

### **Nystrom's descendants looking for the car**

In August 2003, Ben and Mary Nixon and family came to Aruba for the wedding of Jonathan, their nephew. Jonathan's parents, Richard and Gwen Waller and family also came. Upon arrival in Aruba, Ben asked Elio and Mary Elsi Pellegrim if the car still existed as they would like to take a picture of it. Nystrom was a good friend of family Pellegrim when Ben Nixon was P.R. Manager at Lago. Richard and Jonathan are descendants of Roy Nystrom.

Subsequently, Mirto got a call from Elio Pellegrim and the two set a date, August 8<sup>th</sup>, for Elio to present with the visitors and it would be a surprise for them. When they arrived that morning at Mirto's home, they were surprised to see the car with the top down and in top shape. Without doubt, they thought that the car was somewhere in the junk yard. They sat in the car, took pictures, and that moment undoubtedly was a big surprise and emotional for the whole family. Naturally, this brought many fond memories for them.

### **Coverage in Mr. Tino Ruiz' DVD**

At the end of 2003, our talented musician, Mr. Tino Ruiz, produced a CD and DVD with his mandolin guitar. Mirto's car once more was involved in the production of the DVD, in fact a very beautiful production.

### **RBTT Bank's CD Jingle**

On January 2, 2004, Mirto's car was used to take Miss Fatima Salie, our Miss Aruba, to the RBTT Bank to deliver the 50<sup>th</sup> Carnival jingle.

### **Classic Car Aruba participating in Bonaire**

From September 3–7, 2004, fourteen classic cars from Aruba and two Harley Davidson Clubs Aruba participated in the Bonaire Day in Bonaire. There were nine convertibles, including Mirto's, and other sedans. Included in these convertibles was a beautiful 1950 Edsel belonging to Mr. Ale Vrolijk, a board member. Curacao and Bonaire also participated.

### **Participation of Netherlands Antilles in Aruba**

On March 18, 2005, various classic cars from the Netherlands Antilles participated in the Hymn and Flag Day parade in Aruba at the Plaza Libertador Betico Croes.

### **Participation in Curacao**

During the weekend of October 28 -30, 2005, the Aruba Classic Car Club of Aruba were special guests at the 40-year celebration of Wabiclub Curacao, the classic car club in Curacao. Sixteen beautiful classic cars from Aruba participated, including Mirto's 1964 Chevy Convertible. Sunday there was a long trip to Banda Bou and afterwards a delightful dinner at the Avila Beach Hotel.

### **Coincidence**

A remarkable coincidence in the story of Mirto's car is that Mr. Nystrom started to work for Lago on February 3, 1964. Two days before, on February 1, Mirto's father, Mr. Zacharias E. de Kort was promoted to Shift Foreman in the Light Oils Finishing Department. This was the time when Lago started to promote the locals to managerial positions to take over from the foreign staff, who were offered an Early Retirement package deal.

## **Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of the following persons who in one way or the other contributed to the realization of this story: Messrs. Papi Engelhardt, Juan Briezen, Elio S. Pellegrim, Henry Coffi, and Mirto de Kort.

## **Carnival Rent-A-Car**

Mirto is the owner of the Carnival Rent-A-Car, with their head office at Flamingostraat #9, Simeon Antonio and another office at the Princess Beatrix Airport. He and his family run the business.

**From a family car to a classic car**



**Classic Car Club Aruba members**